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DISCUSSION

CRIBBING AND THE USE OF PRINTED TRANSLATIONS

Most teachers, I presume, hold theoretically that "cribbing," or writing the meaning of words or phrases between the lines of the page or in the margin, and the use of "trots" or "ponies," or English translations of the texts, are a distinct hindrance to the acquisition of a foreign language. This is however not true of all teachers, especially college teachers; and even those who are opposed to such methods of preparation are apt in practice to let the matter take care of itself instead of employing frequent and vigorous measures for suppressing the evil. Extended observations of students at work in college libraries and frequent inspection of "cribbed" textbooks have led the writer to a realization of the danger of such habits of work and awakened in him the wish that the war against them might be waged with unabating and relentless vigor.

The cause of cribbing is, ordinarily, the desire of the student to make a good showing in the classroom. He wishes to get credit for what he has actually done and, not trusting to his memory, he resorts to the device of writing in the meanings of the words. He also has his eye on the examination, and fearing he will not have sufficient time to look up so many words again he prepares his book in such a manner that a quick review will be possible. Oftentimes, however, inheriting the cribbed text from some former member of the class, he finds the cribs a very welcome substitute for preparation. He receives as much credit as if he had worked for hours with his dictionary, and gains a lot of extra time for what he conceives to be the more legitimate college activities, namely, sports, dramatics, newspaper work, social life, etc. The weaker students carry the practice of cribbing so far that in case a word appears twice in the same line they attach the same meaning to it both times. A well-cribbed elementary German reader fell recently into the writer's hands. The word *Ritter* occurred twice in a certain line, and in each case the word "knight" was written in above it. Signs of even greater mental degeneracy were the interlinear renderings of such words as *Sonne*, *Haus*, *Rose*, *sprang*, and even *ich* and *ist*.

This practice of cribbing is demoralizing. It weakens the student's memory, and, what is worse, destroys his self-confidence. When he picks up a book without such helps, he is all at sea; he cannot find his bearings even in what ought to be familiar surroundings. He has lost the power to think and to exercise his memory. The habit of cribbing, and it be-

comes a pernicious habit if permitted to grow, nips in the bud, or at least stunts the growth of, any *Sprachgefühl*. When English words are on the page, the eye naturally lights on such familiar objects first. But even though the foreign words are seen first, they are immediately compared with the English equivalents written above or beside them, before the mind has an opportunity to sense their meaning, and all that elusive connoted significance, which must be felt in the original if at all, is lost.

There are two remedies which when applied in conjunction will perhaps serve to expel this noxious disease and restore the healthy, normal brain action. The first is to forbid the writing in of English words under penalty of not receiving credit in the course. The second is to set for examination only (or for the most part) material that the class has never seen before. When once the students realize that the power to handle new material is the test of their work and that a few slips in recitation-hour will not be looked upon as particularly serious they will see that cribbing is not only unnecessary but suicidal.

The question of "trots" is a broader one. In the case of printed translations which are at once good pieces of literature and comparatively faithful renderings of the originals, there will be found many teachers who would either openly advocate their use, or, at any rate, not discountenance it. They seem to feel that these translations are a harmless aid to the work—that the student can cover more ground with them and consequently learn more. They are, however, far from being harmless, especially as our students employ them. There is an ever-present danger that a student will not work out a difficult passage first, but, following the line of least resistance, will at once consult the translation. He loses thereby the power that would have resulted from the overcoming of an obstacle, as well as the attendant increase in his confidence in his own ability to handle the language. How often we see students with the index finger of one hand on the translation and that of the other on a line of text, examining the two alternately and carrying back each time a few equivalents from one to the other. This is especially true when they are tired, in a hurry, or not interested in what they are reading.

English translations serve a useful purpose. They are for those who do not know the foreign tongue. Translations made primarily to be used as "ponies" have been found to fill a demand, an artificial demand, created partly by the natural inertia and sloth of our academic youth, or by the lack of proper time for preparation for half a dozen courses, but principally, I think, by the fact that the reading material has not been chosen with due regard to the stage of advancement and the powers of the individual class or student. The texts have been too difficult.

In order to discourage the use of "trots," we must in the first place teach our students how to read easily and rapidly without the use of a

dictionary,¹ and, secondly, we must make sure that the texts we ask them to procure are such as will be of interest to them and adapted to their stage of advancement. These remedies would also assist in driving out the practice of cribbing. It is particularly desirable that texts be chosen of which no English translations exist or are easily accessible. This will be no difficult task so far as the modern material is concerned, but is out of the question when we find our classes prepared to take up the works, say, of Lessing, Goethe, and Schiller. But let us hope that by the time they have reached this stage we shall have brought them to the point where they can read and get the contents of the work in question without being obliged to translate it into English. They will need to use a dictionary frequently, perhaps, in their study of the especially difficult texts, but let them consult it in order to learn the meaning of the original and not merely to find its equivalent in English words.

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¹For a suggestion as to one way of accomplishing this, see articles entitled "In wie weit darf man sich beim Unterricht in der deutschen Sprache des Uebersetzens ins Englische bedienen?" (*Monatshefte für deutsche Sprache und Pädagogik*, Januar und Februar, 1908), and "Some Practical Hints for Teaching Students How to Read German" (*School Review*, October, 1909).